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The Resilience of the Nation State: Cosmopolitanism, Holocaust Memory and German Identity

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer a critique of the proposal of “methodological cosmopolitanism” in theoretical terms and to substantiate this critique by providing an account of the dynamics of collective memory and identity in postunification Germany. In the first part, we look at the arguments about methodological cosmopolitanism and their derivative, the idea of cosmopolitan memory, illustrated by the case of Holocaust memory. In the second part we look at the case of Germany: firstly at its postwar experience of the attempted construction of “postnational” identity, and then at more recent trends, contemporaneous with the Berlin Republic, towards a “normalization” of national identity in Germany. The Holocaust plays a crucial, but different, role in each phase, we suggest. In the conclusion we return to more general themes, asking what the German case tells us about the cosmopolitanization thesis more generally.

Keywords

cosmopolitanism; Holocaust memory; German identity; Berlin Republic

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to offer a critique of the proposal of “methodological cosmopolitanism” in theoretical terms and to substantiate this critique by providing an account of the dynamics of collective memory and identity in postunification Germany. The methodological cosmopolitanism thesis makes a strong challenge to analytical frameworks that take for granted the grid of the nation state, for instance by supposing that the study of society or politics at least starts, and possibly ends, with the study of national societies or nation-state politics. The study of collective memory, it has been asserted, has suffered from this defect of misplaced “methodological nationalism,” and the example of Holocaust memory has been invoked to demonstrate a cosmopolitanization of memory that displays the necessity of methodological cosmopolitanism.

But we argue that the example of Holocaust memory when looked at more closely carries quite different lessons. It shows in fact the role of national identity and its processes of formation and mutation in the so-called cosmopolitanization of Holocaust memory. The latter development, which we agree to have been underway for some time, cannot be fully understood without invoking the analytical grid of the nation state, in the form of official German national identity and memory discourse. Indeed, the process of cosmopolitanization in this case has as its necessary complement a process of “decosmopolitanization” or “renationalization” of German identity. The example points towards a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between cosmopolitan and national memory, which involves an appreciation of the durability, even in the face of its constructed nature, of the nation-state and its corresponding identity.

In the first part, we look at the arguments about methodological cosmopolitanism and their derivative, the idea of cosmopolitan memory, illustrated by the case of Holocaust memory. In the second part we look at the case of Germany: firstly at its postwar experience of the attempted construction of “postnational” identity, and then at more recent trends, contemporaneous with the Berlin Republic, towards a “normalization” of national identity in Germany. The Holocaust plays a crucial, but different, role in each phase, we suggest. In the conclusion we return to wider themes, asking what the German case tells us about the cosmopolitanization thesis more generally.

Methodological Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitan Memory of the Holocaust

While cosmopolitanism has a long tradition as a philosophy of ethical universalism, it has recently been promoted by social theorist Ulrich Beck and his colleagues in a

new—or ostensibly new—form as a generic outlook for the social sciences. In this section we will begin by focusing attention on a programmatic article by Beck and Natan Sznaider that appeared in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 2006 and whose significance was affirmed by its republication when the same journal collected its most influential articles in a special issue in 2010.¹ We continue by looking at a contribution by Sznaider and Daniel Levy which develops one of the key claims of the methodological cosmopolitanism proposal—that new conceptual frameworks are needed to describe and evaluate the “cosmopolitan condition”—by making the case for a concept of cosmopolitan memory.² Levy and Sznaider illustrate the utility of this concept with the example of Holocaust memory.

Beck and Sznaider make a range of briefly illustrated empirical claims about the “cosmopolitanization of reality” and “cosmopolitan realism,” found in:

every field of social and political action: in international organizations, in bi-national families, in neighbourhoods, in global cities, in transnational military organizations, in the management of multi-national co-operations [*sic*], in production networks, human rights organizations, among ecology activists and the paradoxical global opposition to globalization.³

The authors draw from such empirical phenomena the conclusion that the existing or prevailing modes of social science are in need of replacement, because they take for granted or presuppose “that the unit of analysis is the national society or the national state or the combination of both.”⁴ Existing modes make “methodological nationalism” a “socio-ontological given” whose “basic tenets have become the main perceptual grid of the social sciences.”⁵ “[N]ational organization,” they say, “can no longer serve as the organizing reference point.”⁶

In so far as these claims correctly identify a thoughtlessness or lack of critical reflection about national societies and politics or a “naturalized conception of nations as real communities,”⁷ they are of course well taken. How far such errors of

unthinking assumption have in fact been made and are in need of rectification is debatable, however, and moreover the criticism leaves open the further question of whether a thoughtful invocation of or indeed emphasis on the nation state might be legitimate. We might therefore be skeptical about the next step in Beck and Sznaider's argument, that a new "methodological cosmopolitanism" is necessary in the face of the identified cosmopolitanization of reality: that the cosmopolitan condition demands a cosmopolitan outlook.

The underlying claim here is that new conditions demand new conceptual frameworks. But do they? Surely what we risk by making that claim is simply a different form of the error imputed to existing social science by Beck and Sznaider, namely the rendering invisible of some important empirical phenomena. It is quite plain that existing social science has not been blind to processes often described under the headings of globalization, hybridity, or diaspora, as Beck and Sznaider cannot help but note. Existing conceptual frameworks have been quite adequate to—and arguably are necessary for—the identification of new trends and developments. To say to the contrary that they have unavoidably obscured them is to admit the possibility that their replacement will do the same for other processes. To overstate to this extent the degree of tunnel vision that a conceptual framework imposes is to place a question mark at the outset against any attempt to promote a new one.

The attempt to differentiate their proposal of methodological cosmopolitanism from existing attempts to grasp theoretically the processes of the cosmopolitanization of reality produces some convolutions in Beck and Sznaider's argument. The difficulty is to say what is new about it. The novelty of the approach is said at one point to inhere in its attention to "an *unintended* and *lived* cosmopolitanism,"⁸ as opposed to a reflexive version that continues the cosmopolitan "moral and political

standpoint” that “much of the social scientific discourse has assumed.”⁹ Shortly afterwards, the ground of the claim to novelty is reversed: a novel reflexivity is insisted upon. While it is well known, Beck and Sznaider admit, that “[c]apital tears down all national boundaries and jumbles together the ‘native’ with the ‘foreign,’” they say “[w]hat is new is not forced mixing but *global awareness* of it, its self-conscious public affirmation, its reflection and affirmation before a global public”¹⁰ From these contortions it is hard to resist the conclusion that it is an intellectual brand that is being promoted rather than a new step in knowledge.

But let us turn from these general observations about the proposal of methodological cosmopolitanism and the associated derogation of methodological nationalism (an example, incidentally, of argument by associative labeling, since few academics would wish to be thought of as any kind of nationalist) to a real example of the new conceptual grid that is said to be required. One such is provided by Levy and Sznaider’s discussion of cosmopolitan memory.

“Cosmopolitan memories,” Levy and Sznaider write, “provide a new epistemological vantage point, one that questions the ‘methodological nationalism’ that still prevails in much of the social sciences.”¹¹ Plainly, they are working within the program defined by Beck and Sznaider. Accordingly, we find them faulting existing approaches to collective memory for seeing it as “bound by tight social and political groups like the ‘nation’ or ‘ethnos’” and as being “firmly embedded within the ‘Container of the Nation State.’”¹² Examples of these defects are identified in the influential work of Anthony Smith on national identity and Pierre Nora on “sites of memory.” Smith asserts the artificiality and thinness of “global culture” (his similar skepticism about “European identity” might be mentioned too),¹³ while Nora, suggest

Levy and Sznajder, has a “fixation on the nation-state as the sole possible (and imaginable) source for the articulation of authentic collective memories.”¹⁴

Yet, Levy and Sznajder observe, a strong current of thought has emphasized the constructed and thus initially artificial nature of nations and national identity. While they might have noted that the debate about the formation of national identity is hardly settled, or indeed that Smith’s position is far from a mere recapitulation of the “primordialist,” as opposed to the “modernist,” side in this debate, it is undoubtedly true that understanding of nations, nationalism, and national identity has been much enriched by the findings of writers such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, who have documented the processes of construction empirically.¹⁵ From these observations it must indeed follow that the “artificiality” of an identity cannot be an *a priori* reason for denying the possibility of its sociological realization. So far as collective memory is concerned, this entails accepting, as many writers have, the distinction made by Maurice Halbwachs between lived and historical memories, or the distinction made by Jan Assmann between those remembered through person-to-person transmission and those memorialized in cultural objectifications.¹⁶ Hence, collective memories become more readily available for use outside the “national container” in which the memorialized events took place.

Just this, Levy and Sznajder say, is what has happened to collective memory of the Holocaust. It has been cosmopolitanized. They provide an ample empirical description of this process, dividing it into three phases: the postwar period, the period of the “iconographic formation of the Holocaust” from the 1960s to the 1980s, and the post Cold War period, in which “new narrative frameworks” have “reconfigured the Holocaust as a decontextualized event and contributed to its focal position in the

European memoryscape.”¹⁷ Significantly, however, the empirical survey is also structured in a second way: spatially, as well as chronologically. This structure is constituted by a set of national examples: those of the United States, Israel, and Germany. Quite different dynamics are found in the process of collective memory construction in each case.

In itself this calls into question the claim that the alleged nationcentric grid of existing accounts of collective memory needs to be replaced: at most it may be in need of supplementation. Levy and Sznajder allude to Peter Novick’s account of the evolution of Holocaust memory in the United States,¹⁸ but Novick’s informative book provides considerable illustration of the role of specific political interests and their operation in the specific institutional apparatus of the American “national container.” Novick’s detail as to motive and setting provides a far more compelling interpretation than Levy and Sznajder’s suggestion that “what has pushed the Holocaust to such prominence in public thinking relates to the need for a moral touchstone in an age of uncertainty,”¹⁹ which leaves quite unexplained why *this* moral touchstone has been selected and by whom.

Levy and Sznajder try to come to terms with the obvious, but also problematic, dependence of their argument for the deficiencies of methodological nationalism on a descriptive framework that is itself national. They suggest that “speaking about the cosmopolitanization of Holocaust memory does not imply some progressive universalism subject to a unified interpretation. The Holocaust does not become one totalizing signifier containing the same meanings for everyone.” So far as it goes this is useful, though how far our understanding of the relationship is advanced by speaking of the “mutual constitution of particular and universal conceptions that determine the ways in which the Holocaust can be remembered”²⁰ is questionable,

and not just because of the extreme vagueness of the idea of “mutual constitution.”²¹ Left out of this semiotically inflected account of overlapping or mutually constituting particular and universal interpretations is the question of who is doing the interpreting—the question very much at the forefront of Novick’s analysis.

Indeed, that question of the identity of the constructors in the construction of identity, which is very much a theme of Anderson, Gellner, Hroch and Hobsbawm and Ranger’s constructionist writings on national identity, is absent from the account presented by Levy and Sznajder. A further clue to this absence is the manner in which the authors take note of the role of the U.S. television drama *Holocaust* and the film *Schindler’s List* in producing a “decontextualized memory of the Holocaust.” “In its ‘universalized’ and ‘Americanized’ form,” they write, “it provides Europeans with a new sense of ‘common memory.’”²² Such an easy slide from “American” to “universal” surely eliminates quite a bit from critical scrutiny, in particular the possible advantage for the United States of the recognition of its interests as universal imperatives. Such diversion of scrutiny is all the easier under the guidance of a prohibition on methodological nationalism.

As with Beck and Sznajder’s more general proposal of methodological cosmopolitanism, we therefore find here in one of its applications a converse kind of indifference to the stubbornly national aspects of collective memory construction. We now turn for fuller substantiation of this criticism to the case of Germany.

Germany: From Postnational to National Identity

Levy and Sznajder note that in Germany, as in the other countries they consider, the postwar period was one in which the Holocaust did not loom large as a distinct element of the memory of the Nazi period and its atrocities and calamities. But this

relative silence obviously did not have the same significance in Germany, East or West, as it did in other countries. While the division of Germany was obviously a challenge of great magnitude to any construction of identity, the horrors of the immediate past were an immense additional burden for German national identity, extending their adverse influence indeed over the German past in general, and thus over the very idea of German nationhood.

Germany's Nazi past is generally considered to have provided the basic narrative of the Federal Republic between 1949 and 1990,²³ making any identification with the nation contentious as well as difficult. The history of the Bonn Republic was characterized by a struggle to find a place for the Holocaust and World War II in the country's historical consciousness.²⁴ Even though there was no consensus as to what role the Nazi past should play in West Germany's self-understanding throughout the years of division, there is no doubt that the Holocaust and World War II were crucial in determining (West) Germany's self-understanding. Political institutions as well as policies and discourse clearly bore the imprint of lessons learned from the past—the period 1933 to 1945 was the single most important factor influencing domestic developments as well as West Germany's international status.

The difficulty in creating a positive identification with the German nation was illustrated by society's general reluctance to use national symbols.²⁵ Instead it took refuge in a kind of postnational or postconventional identity which did not rely on the narrow, backward-looking concept of the nation state, but rather anticipated a European identity or an identification with liberal democratic values to fill the void at the nation-state level which other countries easily filled with pride in their historical legacy. To illustrate, the 1992 edition of *Facts about Germany*, produced in cooperation with the German Foreign Office, asserted: "to Germans, nation-state

attitudes are a thing of the past.”²⁶ This assertion is a fine example of the rejection of normative nationalism and an embrace of cosmopolitanism as a normative position.

The Federal Republic was therefore a model cosmopolitan state, not only in terms of Beck and Sznaider’s “normative-philosophical” cosmopolitanism, but also as an embodiment, at least incipiently, of the cosmopolitan condition. It showed a reluctance to articulate its national interest openly. It embraced Europeanism both as a cosmopolitan target of identification and also in part as a set of devices that locked in West Germany’s progress beyond the national paradigm. Its general approach to foreign policy was characterized by a renunciation of power politics as well as a style that showed modesty, moderation, and self-limitation. It was deeply committed to rights and values, as expressed (in universal language) in the Basic Law. It showed a commitment to multilateralism and a keenness to pool sovereignty in supranational structures. West German political elites as well as society at large were model Europeans and consistently pro-integrationist, with the idea of Europe and the possibility of embracing a new collective identity at the European level providing a highly welcome alternative to an identification with the discredited German nation. European integration was increasingly favored over the concept of the nation state²⁷ and was considered as a progressive and forward-looking alternative to the outmoded and narrow-minded identification with the nation. Political elites as well as the West German population at large supported European integration, even if this meant financial sacrifices at times, as long as they were in the longer-term interest of the European project. In contrast to other European countries like Britain, there was also no significant institutionalized opposition to the European project throughout the lifetime of the Bonn Republic. West German political elites and society at large were

characterized by what has been described as a “European imperative,”²⁸ “reflexive Europeanism,”²⁹ or “quasi-automatic consent” in European matters.³⁰

Controversies such as the Historians’ Debate (*Historikerstreit*) of the 1980s, which involved the attempt of some historians to de-emphasize the uniqueness of the Nazi period in order to broaden the appreciation of other elements of the national past, showed that the achievement of a postnational or cosmopolitan condition in West Germany was far from settled or complete. But the presence of cosmopolitan elements and aspirations in the state’s own discourse, and that of leading West German commentators, was already a distinctive attribute. We do not of course need to suppose, naively, that national interest was absent in this period from the calculations of West German leaders. There is no doubt, however, that at a minimum it expressed itself in a distinctive manner, and in so far as its mode of expression was an economic one in the context of the *Modell Deutschland*, its openness to global processes and influences was a starting point of policy not (as in many other settings) the end point of an arduous struggle.

One might argue about the depth or authenticity of the postnational identity that seemed to be under construction in postwar Germany,³¹ though this is not a mode of argument available to the writers on collective memory we have been considering, for whom arguments asserting national authenticity are precisely examples of the national essentialism they seek to combat. Whatever the depth of the postwar cosmopolitanization, it is hard to dispute the claim that a significant turn in identity discourse occurred after unification. In a nutshell, this discourse defied the claims of the advocates of methodological cosmopolitanism by shifting from postnational to national.

At the same time as Holocaust memory has taken its “cosmopolitan turn,” as discussed by Levy and Sznajder, collective memory in Germany has been characterized by a number of other key developments. Since the generational change in German government in 1998 and in particular Gerhard Schröder’s accession to the chancellorship, the memory of Germany’s Nazi past has been made a lot more palatable. Initiatives undertaken by the Red-Green coalition under Schröder’s leadership as of 1998, for example the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the fund for compensating forced labor, suggested that an acknowledgement of culpability was being translated into practice.³² It soon became apparent, however, that these moves were coupled with very confident expressions of national identity which contributed to a “normalization” of Germany, unprecedented in the postwar period.

Shortly after coming to power, Schröder, the first German chancellor without a living memory of the Third Reich, articulated a stance on the Nazi past that bridged two previously incompatible positions. Despite unambiguously recognizing German culpability, he did not allow the Nazi past to function as an obstacle to a positive German national identity. In a November 1998 talk show, for example, Schröder declared he planned to represent a Germany that was “less inhibited” and—even more astonishing for a center-left coalition leader—one that was “in a positive sense maybe even more German.”³³ For his generation, he provided a novel perspective on the Nazi past and German identity. Whereas positive expressions of national identity had previously been deemed impossible because of Auschwitz, as traditionally argued among the liberal left, or had to be “historicized,” as maintained by the right, Schröder attempted to dissolve this tension by promoting an approach that fully acknowledged culpability for crimes committed during the Third Reich, but that did

not prevent the articulation of a positive identification with the German nation, and rather confident conduct in general.

In his government declaration of 10 November 1998, Schröder referred to the “self-confidence of a grown-up nation” which felt neither inferior nor superior towards others. He depicted Germany as a nation which faced up to its history and acknowledged the responsibilities arising from it.³⁴ In a 1999 interview, Schröder further explained that, rather than providing a constraint, the readiness of a new generation to engage with the Nazi past could become empowering, insofar as it created “an opportunity to represent one’s own interests in a more uninhibited manner.”³⁵ Schröder clearly promoted further German “normalization,” but this was not to happen at the expense of Holocaust memory and German responsibility.

At the same time as Holocaust memory was made more “palatable” for identificatory purposes, the “Germans as victims” discourse returned suddenly and strongly to literary, historical and political debates after the turn of the millennium.³⁶ This discourse, part of which the Merkel governments have proposed to institutionalize by creating a Center against Expulsions in Berlin, has to some extent offset the exclusive role of perpetrator with which the Holocaust confronts German memory, again contributing to the usability of that memory.

Concurrently, new narratives of the German nation have emerged which emphasize positive aspects of German history such as the achievements of the Bonn Republic, the peaceful East German revolution of 1989 and unification, adding up to a past that has become much more “usable” in the construction of national identity.³⁷

In what appears to be a delayed and indirect response to Michael Stürmer’s demand in the *Historikerstreit* that Germany needs a positive history,³⁸ there are numerous examples showing that the politics of the past as constructed by

postunification political elites is characterized by a recognition of the achievements of German history. The main features of this new narrative of the nation involve success and freedom, as evidenced in its emphasis on the Federal Republic's postwar accomplishments as well as the post Wall unity and freedom achieved through the peaceful revolution and unification.³⁹

Not surprisingly, the Federal Republic's fiftieth anniversary afforded a welcome occasion for a politics of the past that could focus on positive aspects of German history. With its core principles of freedom, justice, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, the Basic Law itself (with a degree of historical determinism) could be claimed, as it was by Federal President Roman Herzog, to be both the starting point of and the driving force behind the process that led from the foundation of the FRG to unification.⁴⁰ Two years earlier, then Bundesrat President and Minister President of Baden-Württemberg, Erwin Teufel, had praised the constitution's authors for their wisdom. They "not only stipulated the goal of unity and the commitment to unification, but also, via article twenty-three, prepared the path for the East German states to join." He further credited them with "keeping this path open by not giving up on their demand for self-determination for the Germans in the GDR and by consistently rejecting a separate citizenship for them."⁴¹ The provisions and politics of the Bonn Republic are thus held to have been instrumental in bringing about unification—this is one of the many achievements claimed in depicting the Bonn Republic as a success story.

If Bonn's success story emerges as a core theme in the official memory discourse subsequent to unification, then one occasion in particular stands out. Considering the occasion, it may have been a rather ill-fitting title, but in a speech with the title *Begabung zur Freiheit* (Talent for Freedom) the then Federal President Horst Köhler

used the sixtieth anniversary celebrations marking the end of World War II to paint in the brightest of colors a history of postwar Germany in which the reason for the anniversary, i.e., the Third Reich and World War II, seemed to be very much glossed over. The denazification process is described as “going too far by some critics and not going far enough by others;” and it is claimed that the country had succeeded in “banning the leading Nazis as a group from political life.” Köhler refers to the early postwar reluctance of Germans to discuss the atrocities committed as a “silence on which both victims and perpetrators often agreed,” suggesting it might have been “necessary in order for the people to be able to take a step back and start from scratch.”⁴²

In this narrative, German history is not a hindrance but rather offers another opportunity for showcasing the country as a success story: “We see our country in its entire history, which is why we realize how much good there is that we can connect with in order to overcome the moral ruin of the years from 1933 to 1945.” Included in this good history claimed by Köhler are enlightenment thinkers like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Immanuel Kant, the ideas of the 1848 revolution, the nineteenth century development of the legal system, and the ideals of the labor movement, as well as the heritage of the German resistance to fascism, to mention just a few.⁴³

Köhler’s speech is among the clearest of contemporary examples of national identity construction by a political leader. He constructs a history of post 1945 Germany and frames it as a complete success story, in which any problems can be overcome: the positive always prevails. He acknowledges that dissent has been one of the main features of the Bonn Republic—on issues such as the market economy, rearmament, NATO and European Union membership, and Ostpolitik. Yet he leaves no room for doubt regarding his final claim, that there is an overarching consensus:

“Hindsight shows clearly that all these decisions were right, something the large majority of the people as well as the respective parliamentary opposition ended up realizing.” The Bonn Republic, as constructed by Köhler, is a country whose success as a democracy is beyond doubt or question. Its success as a democracy is in turn utilized to legitimize an imperfect present and thus protect it against criticism: “Sixty years after World War II, our country is facing some difficulties ... But Germany is a stable democracy.” This construct serves to justify a positive national identity to be embraced by Germans without much self-doubt or modesty. Köhler reminds us that alongside the “feeling of gratitude towards those who helped build the country,” there remains “the conviction that we Germans have gone down the path towards freedom and democracy out of our own talent for freedom.”⁴⁴

These examples, among many others that could be cited, of the more positive and uninhibited construction of German national identity and national memory by its highest state officials, do not by any means contradict the idea that Holocaust memory has been cosmopolitanized. But they hardly show the irrelevance of the nation-state to this process. Levy and Sznajder indeed make a revealing acknowledgement of just this:

The post-Cold War era and the aftermath of reunification ... compelled Germany to find a new political and cultural place in Europe. It did so by pursuing a dual strategy centering the Holocaust as an integral part of national history (see for instance the decade-long debate regarding the memorial in Berlin), and simultaneously decentering it by turning the Holocaust into a European event ...⁴⁵

Here a *cui bono* argument is clearly implied, and the “who” that benefits is Germany. This is already enough to call into question the precept of methodological cosmopolitanism. To substantiate the claim of a German “strategy” would raise the question even more explicitly, which may in part account for the absence of any attempt to do so on Levy and Sznajder’s part. It would in fact be difficult to show the

existence of deliberate strategizing about Holocaust memory on the part of German leaders. Nevertheless, our brief survey of their discourse on national identity shows quite clearly the rhetorical advantage the decentering of the Holocaust has for the construction of national collective memory.

We will not have properly understood the process if it is seen only as a disembodied one whereby the memory of the Holocaust comes to serve some general purpose such as a yearning for meaning and moral certitude in the face of globalizing pressures. Germany has been able to offload Holocaust memory, which has indeed become a global phenomenon. With that noxious material expelled from the national container, far from the container “cracking,”⁴⁶ its refurbishment could proceed. The irony that one has to look at state interests, as expressed with a fair degree of concreteness by high officials, in order to understand properly the process of cosmopolitanization of memory is compounded when one looks at the contrast between such expressions before and after unification, or more specifically the generational change of 1998. Germany has moved away from a cosmopolitan construction of its own identity over this period, towards a more familiar national one.⁴⁷ It is a case, at least in part, of “de-cosmopolitanization.”

Conclusion: Understanding Cosmopolitanization and the Perils of Methodological Cosmopolitanism

That there exists a real process of cosmopolitanization, that cosmopolitan memory is one of its symptomatic phenomena, and that Holocaust memory is in turn an example of this phenomenon, is unquestionable,⁴⁸ and it has not been our purpose in this article to question it. The question instead is how the general process, the symptomatic phenomenon, and the example are to be understood. Our purpose has been to express doubt as to the claim that a new conceptual apparatus is required and that the existing

one is vitiated by a defective methodological nationalism. We agree with Claire Sutherland, who in a forthcoming book discusses the “cosmopolitan challenge,” but notes that it does not imply the decline of either the nation state or nationalist ideology.⁴⁹ We have used the case of Germany, raised directly of course by the Holocaust memory example, to expand upon our theoretical objections with some empirical evidence. We will now summarize and restate our objections.

The thesis of “cosmopolitanization of reality” has as one of its implications the erosion of the nation-state “container” of social, political and cultural processes. The nation state is neither primordial nor eternal, empirically, and is indeed not exhaustive, analytically, so no *a priori* assumption that insisted that it is would be legitimate. Yet to allow the necessity of empirical investigation of this erosion process is far from justifying a conceptual shift away from the nation-state. The need for such a shift has been argued in the past, most famously by Karl Marx, and it is equally notorious that the blind spot created in the empirical gaze of Marxism became one of its chief weaknesses.

More recently, the empirical relevance of the nation state has been challenged by investigations under the heading of “multi-level governance.”⁵⁰ This, too, has coupled a conceptual shift with a shift in empirical attention. But the shift from “government” to “governance” by which the decentering of the nation state is achieved in this case has also, like the conceptual revision we are discussing, concealed as much as it has revealed. The agenda of good governance, for example, is arguably an agenda that installs the interests of certain states over those of others, with the significant addition that the inequality is established covertly. For some states, more governance (for instance by the World Trade Organization, WTO) means less government, but for others the relationship is positive-sum, to the extent that their national interests are

enhanced by the activities of the WTO and are indeed disproportionately influential in its policy.⁵¹ The resulting inequalities and power differentials cannot be seen except with a lens that places the nation-state at its focal point.

The nation-state, and in particular its political leadership, though its journalists and commentators should not be ignored, remains a prime source of the imaginary that, by constituting the national community, maintains the nation state's own existence. This is no uniform fact, and is by all means subject to differentiation across space, but in this regard it would be particularly damaging to lose sight of the power differentials that are involved: to forget, for example, the difference between "universalism" and "Americanism" (as proponents of the latter are wont to do). One can see these differentials only by remaining fully aware of the central organizing role of the nation state. Neither is the centrality of the nation state an eternal fact: it varies over time, as the cosmopolitanization thesis suggests. The example of Germany, however, shows that the variation is not always in a single direction.

The cosmopolitanization and, linked to that, partial de-Germanization of Holocaust memory has meant that Germany has, to a degree, shaken off the past. The memory of the Holocaust and World War II has lost its predictable grip on policy and discourse in the Berlin Republic and no longer constitutes the basic narrative of the German polity. Evidence of this can be seen in the way the political elites of the Berlin Republic have lost their reluctance to express Germany's national interest much more openly and in a less inhibited manner. At the same time as (West) Germany's model Europeanism has waned, the pursuit of its national interest has grown. As we have shown, this is increasingly underpinned by a new narrative of the nation which emphasizes positive aspects of German history. The national container is thus being replenished with a more usable past.

Beck and Sznajder assert that “even the re-nationalization or re-ethnification of minds, cultures and institutions has to be analysed within a cosmopolitan frame of reference”.⁵² The case of Germany if anything shows the reverse of Beck and Sznajder’s contention: that cosmopolitanization is most profitably analyzed within a national frame of reference.

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Notes

- ¹ Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznajder, “Unpacking Cosmopolitanism for the Social Sciences: A Research Agenda,” *British Journal of Sociology* 61, no. s1, Special Issue: “The *BJS*: Shaping Sociology over 60 Years” (2010), 381–403.
- ² Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002), 87–106.
- ³ Beck and Sznajder (see note 1), 383.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 382f.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 384f.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 384.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 384.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 387; Beck and Sznajder’s italics.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 386.

- ¹⁰ Ibid., 390; Beck and Sznaider's italics.
- ¹¹ Levy and Sznaider (see note 2), 103.
- ¹² Ibid., 88.
- ¹³ Anthony D. Smith, "National Identity and the Idea of European Unity," *International Affairs* 68, no. 1 (1992), 55–76.
- ¹⁴ Levy and Sznaider (see note 2), 90. It is debatable whether it is the nation state whose erosion Nora laments, or rather "a tradition of memory" itself, existing "in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body's inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories." Indeed it is surely the "history" that Nora regretfully says has replaced memory that more closely relates to the nation state. See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations*, no. 26, Special Issue: "Memory and Counter-Memory" (1989), 7–24, quotations at 11, 13.
- ¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*, new edn (New York, 2000); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).
- ¹⁶ Levy and Sznaider (see note 2), 91.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 97.
- ¹⁸ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999).
- ¹⁹ Levy and Sznaider (see note 2), 93.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 92.

- ²¹ For a critique of the use of this formula—which she dubs “central conflation”—in the work of several prominent social theorists, see Margaret A. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1988), 76–80.
- ²² Levy and Sznajder (see note 2), 100.
- ²³ See for example, Michael Schwab-Trapp, “Der Nationalsozialismus im öffentlichen Diskurs über militärische Gewalt,” in *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, ed. Wolfgang Bergem (Opladen, 2003), 171–85, 173.
- ²⁴ See for example Martin Broszat, *Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte* (Munich, 1988), Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1999) and Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German Identity* (Cambridge, 1988).
- ²⁵ For a discussion of this, see Peter Reichel, *Schwarz-Rot-Gold. Kleine Geschichte deutscher Nationalsymbole* (Munich, 2005).
- ²⁶ *Facts about Germany* (Frankfurt, 1992), 165.
- ²⁷ See Manuela Glaab, “Einstellungen zur deutschen Einheit” in *Handbuch zur deutschen Einheit 1949–1989–1999*, ed. Werner Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte (Frankfurt/Main, 1999), 306–16, 310.
- ²⁸ Frank Brunssen, *Das neue Selbstverständnis der Berliner Republik* (Würzburg, 2005), 27.
- ²⁹ William E. Paterson, “Does Germany Still Have a European Vocation?,” *European Research Working Paper Series*, Institute for German Studies/European Research Institute, 15 (2006), 13.
- ³⁰ Christian Schweiger, *Britain, German and the European Union* (Basingstoke, 2007), 62.

- ³¹ Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford, 2006).
- ³² Ideas for a national memorial had emerged in the 1980s. For a discussion of this, and Helmut Kohl’s position, see Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London, 2002), 194–232. In view of his comments regarding the “grace of a late birth,” as he put it in a speech to the Israeli Knesset, Kohl’s contribution to the commemoration of the Holocaust faced significant limits. See Ruth Wittlinger, *German National Identity in the 21st Century: A Different Republic After All?* (Basingstoke, 2010), 23.
- ³³ Quoted in Werner A. Perger “Wir Unbefangenen”, *Die Zeit*, 12 November 1998.
- ³⁴ Gerhard Schröder, *Regierungserklärung*, 10 November 1998.
- ³⁵ Gerhard Schröder, Interview, *Die Zeit*, 4 February 1999.
- ³⁶ This discourse initially mainly related to victims of the allied bombing raids and Germans who faced expulsions towards the end of the war and in its immediate aftermath, but later also extended to other groups such as German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union and women who were raped by soldiers of the Red Army. For a discussion of the “Germans as victims” discourse, see Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims* (Basingstoke, 2006) and Eric Langenbacher, “Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany”, *German Politics and Society* 21, no. 2, (2003), 46–68.
- ³⁷ For the idea of a “usable past” see Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001).
- ³⁸ Michael Stürmer, “Geschichte im geschichtslosen Land,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 November 1986.

- ³⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see Ruth Wittlinger and Steffi Boothroyd, “A ‘Usable’ Past At Last? The Politics of the Past in United Germany”, *German Studies Review* 33, no. 3 (2010), 489–502.
- ⁴⁰ Roman Herzog, “Ansprache des Bundespräsidenten,” 23 May 1999.
- ⁴¹ Erwin Teufel, “Ansprache des Präsidenten des Bundesrates,” 3 October 1997.
- ⁴² Horst Köhler, “Begabung zur Freiheit,” 8 May 2005.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Levy and Sznaider (see note 2), 97.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 88.
- ⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of recent changes to German national identity, see Wittlinger (see note 32).
- ⁴⁸ It does not follow that all the empirical claims of the cosmopolitanization thesis need to be accepted, any more than the related claim of globalization has gone unchallenged empirically. See for instance Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Oxford, 1999) and David Marsh, Nicola J. Smith and Nicola Hothi, “Globalization and the State,” in *The State: Theories and Issues*, eds. Colin Hay, Michael Lister and David Marsh (Basingstoke and New York, 2006), 172–89.
- ⁴⁹ Claire Sutherland, *Nationalism in the 21st Century: Challenges and Responses* (Basingstoke, forthcoming), Preface.
- ⁵⁰ Ian Bache and Matthew Flinders, eds., *Multi-Level Governance* (Oxford, 2004).
- ⁵¹ Stephen Welch and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, “Multi-Level Governance and International Relations,” in Bache and Flinders (see note 50), 127–44.
- ⁵² Beck and Sznaider (see note 1), 385.

